

PARAMETERS IN THE CONSUMPTION OF TRADITIONAL FOOD PRODUCTS

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RESUMEN

Factores que influyen sobre el consumo de alimentos tradicionales

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INTRODUCCIÓN

El objetivo de este Trabajo Fin de Carrera es estudiar los diferentes factores que influyen en el consumo de alimentos tradicionales, entendiendo por tradicional, un producto de consumo frecuente o asociado a las celebraciones específicas, que se transmiten de una generación a otra, hecho de una manera específica, procesado de forma natural o asociado a un determinado lugar, región o país. Para ello analizaremos el consumo actual de alimentos tradicionales, el nivel de conocimiento sobre estos productos y sus hábitos de consumo.

Dichos factores, tienen un gran interés socioeconómico, ya que permiten establecer estrategias de marketing centradas en la obtención de una mayor cuota de mercado, así como la de entender el consumo de estos productos en concreto. Este tema ha sido ya tratado por numerosos investigadores, desde el punto de vista del consumidor y de cómo sus características (edad, estado civil, estudios, sexo...) afectan al consumo de alimentos tradicionales, sin embargo, no se ha enfocado desde como los diferentes factores de los alimentos (región, naturalidad, procesado, sabor, época del año...) afectan a este consumo.

El trabajo se llevará a cabo en la Universidade Católica Portuguesa de Oporto, en la Escuela Superior de Biotecnología, supervisado por Eduardo Luis Cardoso y Manuela Pintado.

METODOLOGÍA

Llevar a cabo este trabajo, implica un estudio de literatura de diferentes textos y artículos sobre los factores ya conocidos, así como de las diversas opiniones de consumidores sobre ello.

Partiendo de esta información, redactamos un conjunto de preguntas que serán formuladas a grupos focales con el fin de corroborar dichos factores ya conocidos y obtener nuevos, mas relacionados con las características de los alimentos en sí, que con las de los consumidores. Estos grupos focales, son grupos de personas de entre seis a ocho participantes y un moderador que realiza las cuestiones y organiza la discusión. Las preguntas están orientadas al análisis de cómo afectan diferentes caracteres de las personas al consumo de estos alimentos, así como de recoger las percepciones, opiniones, creencias y aptitudes de los consumidores hacia ellos.

Para la obtención de dicha información utilizamos un método cualitativo de preguntas abiertas, con el fin de conocer la opinión de los encuestados en su totalidad y no a través de elementos concretos, como en los métodos cuantitativos. Es por ello, por lo que se valora la existencia de un mayor trato con las personas involucradas, que nos ayudara a obtener mejores resultados.

Una vez obtenidos los datos, procederemos a su análisis mediante “webQDA”, un programa dirigido a investigadores, muy útil para apoyar el análisis de datos cualitativos. Con ello, redactaremos las conclusiones de cuáles de esos factores van a ser los más determinantes en el consumo de alimentos tradicionales.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is a complex phenomenon, which includes biological, nutritional and socio-cultural aspects. The economic, social and cultural change, coupled with the industrialization, rhythms of life, increased school attendance, etc. have caused significant changes in consumption, in the food models and structure of the diets. This is why; we will look at the behavior and attitudes of consumers toward the power, focusing on a particular food, traditional foods.

Food consumption has suffered many changes in recent years. Consumers demand better quality, more natural products, or flavors that remind them of the food they used to eat in the past, with no preservatives or dyes. Because of this, traditional food is one of the most accepted in today's society, even though it is difficult to have it on a daily basis, due to the pace and busy life people have nowadays.

Traditional food products (TFP) are defined as known food products we eat frequently and that our grandparents would have eaten ([Hersleth, 1998](#)). A traditional food product is a common consumer product associated with specific celebrations, which is passed from one generation to another. It is made in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage and is naturally processed. It is distinguished and known for its sensory properties and related to a particular place, region or country ([Guerrero, 1998](#)). Traditional foods represent a growing segment in the European food market.

With respect to the definitions obtained in different sources, we can group traditional foods in the following:

- Traditional foods by date of consumption.
- Traditional foods by region
- Traditional foods by celebration

When talking about traditional foods by date of consumption, we mean food such as bread, cheese, wine, meat, pasta, and so on. Products that were consumed by our ancestors and belong to the basic group of food, as long as they maintain their original sensory properties and their composition and nutrients are not modified in excess. This last point is difficult to assess because, despite needing to keep food traditionality, nowadays markets require changes in their products in order to survive. In an increasingly competitive market for food, the traditional food industry in Europe needs to be innovative in order to maintain market shares ([Jordan, 2000](#)). From a consumer perspective, innovation in food may involve real novelty or modifications of already existing

products (Guerrero et al., 2009). However, some believe that innovation and traditional things are two opposing concepts. Therefore, traditional food producers face the challenge of incorporating the proposed changes and innovations in the food industry without damaging its image (Guerrero L, 2010).

Traditional foods by region are those that are typical of a place or country, which preserves some specific characteristics obtained from this region, either because of its location, climate, soil, and so on...

Traditional foods by celebration are those whose consumption significantly increases at the arrival of a specific date or celebration, for example grapes at the end of the year.

In addition to the food in question, another important factor that will influence consumption is the consumer himself.

The role of consumer has become increasingly important in recent years in certain market segments. The understanding of their needs, desires and their satisfaction is a concern for the market research analyzing consumer's minds, trying to think like them and discover what exactly their wants are.

The food consumer is the one that demands food provided by a producer, who consumes or purchases these products for his or her own consumption. We can also define a consumer as the economical agent who has a variety of needs and desires, and also a disposable income with which to meet those needs through market mechanisms.

In this study, we present a definition of the consumer and traditional food products, along with a discussion of the image consumers have of these products and the various factors that lead to consumption. The results allow us to see how the consumer identifies with this food and how personality traits, gender, age, activity affects their choices. This will be carried out with two methods. The first one qualitative, with questions to focus groups (closed groups of 6 to 10 people) in which the effect of socio-economic characteristics will be studied.

The aim is to obtain new data and contrast existing ones in order to establish marketing strategies focused on gaining greater market share

OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the current consumption of traditional products.
- Analyze the level of knowledge about traditional foods.
- Determine what drives consumers to buy one or another product.
- Study the most valued attributes in a traditional food, their places of purchase, cost, and so on...
- Investigate the factors that influence consumer's acquisition of this food.
- Analyze the habits of Portuguese, Spanish and Romanian consumers.

METHODOLOGY

In this section we explain the methodology used in the consumer behavior investigation, explaining the scope of study, questionnaire design and the ways the data are taken from the population.

Population is the set of all individuals, objects, processes or events that form the subject interest. The population is directly related to the field of study ([Moraguez et al, 2006](#)).

The scope of work study is students from the Universidade Católica Portuguesa and students from different universities of Spain, Portugal and Romania.

Commercial research is an objective and systematic search of relevant information with the intent to identify or solve any problem or situation in the area of marketing ([Green, 1998](#)). To this end, there have been made some surveys for closed groups of people, about 6-8 people with open questions (focus groups).

These consist, as already said, in groups of 6-8 participants, a moderator who performs and organizes the discussion questions, and a tape recorder to collect information. The moderator takes questions participants one at a time. These questions are aimed for analyzing how different characters affect people when consuming, so after collecting the opinions of respondents, we proceed to analysis.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Surveys are descriptive research tools that require to identify the questions to ask, the people selected (representing the population) and determine the method used to collect the information. It is also necessary to define the size of the sample and the method of choice of component elements (Trespalcios-Vazquez-Bello, 2005)

The questionnaire is the media that covers the questions that are asked in a survey of persons selected in the sample. It is the medium that allows communication between interviewer and interviewee to obtain the information provided for in the design of the survey.

Questionnaires used several types of questions depending on the purpose in the search for information, and then discuss the types of questions most commonly used together with the characteristics that define (Trespalcios-Vazquez -Beautiful, 2005):

- Closed Questions: The answers are provided for and are presented to the respondent in the shape of alternatives among which it has to choose the data collection is very simple and its subsequent treatment also. Its greatest disadvantage forcing the response to the interviewee, when the alternative proposals do not collect your real opinion.
- Open questions: Do not contain any type of response expected in advance; hence the interviewee has freedom to respond in this type of questions. The information is more rich in content, since that the interviewee has total freedom to reflect his true opinion. The biggest drawback is that the analysis becomes more complex, especially when it comes to obtain data.

To carry out the interviews, we have a type of questionnaire open-ended questions, so the response obtained will be free and not forced. This method is a technique for qualitative research. To understand what we mean by qualitative research we show the following table in which we can watch the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

Differences between qualitative and quantitative research

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Subjective	Objective
Centered in the phenomenology and understanding	Based on the probabilistic induction of logical positivism
Naturist observation without control	Penetrating and controlled Measurement
Inference from their data	Inferences beyond the data
Exploratory, descriptive and inductive	Confirmatory, inferential and deductive
Process-oriented	Result Oriented
Data "rich and deep"	Data "solid and repeatable"
Not generalizable	Generalizable
Dynamic Reality	Static Reality

Table1

The qualitative methodology objective, as indicated by its definition, is the description of the qualities of a phenomenon: it is not a question of testing or measuring to what extent a certain quality is found in a certain given event, but to discover so many qualities as possible.

The main features that we can draw are, firstly, that this type of method bases its strategy in trying to know the facts, processes, etc. in its entirety, and not through concrete elements. Secondly, uses procedures that make observations less comparable in time, at the cultural level, etc. That is, looking for less generalization, focusing more on the phenomenology and symbolic interactions. A third characteristic is important regarding the role of the researcher in dealing with persons involved in the research process, in order to understand it.

The researcher develops or affirms the central patterns and problems of their work during the same process of research. For this reason, the concepts that were handled in the qualitative research are not defined, in the majority of cases, from the beginning of the investigation.

Focus Groups

The focus groups or discussion groups are an interview technique that normally gathers between six and twelve participants and a moderator, in an overview of structured discussion on a particular topic. The participants are selected in such a way to ensure similar characteristics among them.

The questions are made by a moderator, and the goal is to collect the perceptions, opinions, beliefs and skills in relation to a product, service, concept, advertising, or packaging idea. Therefore, there are no good or bad answers; the important thing is that each person shares his or her opinion openly.

Characteristics of the focus groups

- It is an appropriate process to facilitate the learning of the members of the organization.
- The theme is focused on a specific aspect.
- The participants have certain homogeneous characteristics.
- The purpose was not to establish consensus, but rather to establish the perceptions, feelings, opinions and thoughts from users about products, services and opportunities
- Qualitative data is obtained.
- Can be a good forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

The main advantages of the focus groups are: it is a social process, lively, dynamic, in which people interact; the views of people can change as they listen to the other participants. It is also cheap; you get results fast, in addition to give the possibility to explore matters not otherwise provided for in advance depending on the conversation. However, there are also some disadvantages compared to other methods of research, such as: the data is more difficult to analyze, it can be difficult to gather the right group of people, and an interviewer has less control over a group than in an interview, etc.

ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED

Once you have made the focus groups, we proceed to analyze the results obtained. The interview was conducted on two groups of people, in both the questionnaire was the same, and the time devoted to the meeting environment to the twenty minutes. In the first focus group, there were three people interviewed being all of them female employees of companies in the food sector. In the second group, the interviewees were eighteen students of bioengineering. Both interviews were carried out following an agenda of issues, while respecting the response times of each respondent and all of it was recorded, being the participants aware of it, for later analysis.

Technical content analysis

The data obtained is intended to answer the main question of this research: Which are the most important determinants in the consumption of traditional food?

Therefore, the most striking factors and greater influence for consumers are:

1 Region

The region is the most decisive factor when choosing a traditional food. This is because the majority of the people, relates traditional, not necessarily with an old food, but with the typical one of a place or area. It is prepared in a specific way, with a unique raw material, which is going to make the difference between that product and the rest.

"The word traditional sounds to me like demarcated regions, products made with materials specific from each region, which gives them the food to certain characteristics, i.e. a more specialized production, as it is the material of the region, is what makes the products maintain a few attributes specific." (grupofocal1)

" ... A typical product that you can identify with a region, with a brand, made with the traditional methods" (grupofocal2)

1.1 Region due to family issues

In this case, the foods are consumed by family tradition, that is to say, the typical food of the area in which the consumer lives, are the more usual in their food, and the most easily accessible.

" ... The traditional term is somewhat typical of a region, typical of a time perhaps, probably for a long time and that each country, each region and each space has its traditional product" (grupofocal2)

1.2 "Region due to cultural aspects

In this case, the consumer will be supplied by products that even without being of the region in which he lives, by experience or innovate; he consumes food typical of another region. This can be given as we have seen by traveling, or simply by a person's education.

" ... If you visit a new place, you want to try the typical products of the area, whether in typical restaurants or in specific shops. You are Experiencing since you are in a new place, and you have the chance as we have said before, of consuming products that you do not consume in your day to day, because they are of that particular place." (grupofocal1)

"A reliable hydro massage of Porto has nothing to do with one of Lisbon, because within a same country there are many differences." (grupofocal2)

"If we are in a country, what we want is to test any of the traditional products, because a priori they are the best things to have." (grupofocal2)

2 Flavor

The taste is an important determining factor in consumption, and more when we talk about food. Traditional food are tastier than the rest of food according to those interviewed, and is therefore one of the factors that matter most when choosing a traditional food. An important fact is that all the interviewees relate traditional food with good taste and unique flavor.

"Traditional foods have more flavor than others; it was something crucial in these foods, while others were more insipid." (grupofocal1)

"Usually people appreciate more these foods, they are much better" (grupofocal2)

"I think the flavor also depends on the region. i like more the typical products from here (Porto) than for example, those from the region of Lisbon. I don't like the taste, surely I am not accustomed" (grupofocal2)

3 Aspect

The aspect is a feature that the food is going to have due to the way of development, conservation, etc. That is specific, and is what is going to convert it into traditional.

"It is a product that is produced with a few parameters of quality, which has join a particular form of development, it has a aspect, given a texture that is what gives the quality" (grupofocal1)

4 Health

Health earns more and more importance each day to people, and that in its power, tend to seek healthy products. Traditional foods are not exactly healthy in its majority.

"No, I dot think so. I don't think that traditional and health are related as well, in fact quite the opposite, in general they are products that are not as healthy. They are more a whim" (grupofocal1)

"For me they are not as healthy as other products can be, since large companies research to achieve a healthy final product. But one could say that they are more natural" (grupofocal2)

5 Times of the year

The time of the year is another factor that will determine the consumption of certain products. As there are traditional foods linked to specific dates its consumption increases considerably in that time of year; as can be Christmas, parties, etc.

"For example, are typical, when there are festivals of a place, you tend to eat what is traditional there. Are products made at home and therefore I felt that are tastier than others." (grupofocal2)

"When talking about Christmas, for example, people normally do not consume "caldo verde" in a day a day basis. After that there are others, such as wine or cheese, but some are specific to some dates" (grupofocal1)

"For example, the cheese of "serra" is consumed in a different way in Christmas than the rest of the year" (grupofocal1)

6 Naturalness

The naturalness of the traditional products is assured. They are not like other products, treated with additives, sweeteners etc., and is due to its artisan elaboration, so that you get a natural product.

"To seek the naturalness of the product, I usually buy in markets, although there are also large areas that have good brands and products." (grupofocal1)

"Natural... how to do Natural in that sense? If they are more artisanal? I believe that if..." (grupofocal1)

"Products are developed in a more traditional way, more crafted" (grupofocal2)

7 Quality

Quality is a factor that is implicit for consumers in the term traditional food. Even so, they are considered more expensive products than the rest, by its further and artisanal elaboration. The consumer is willing to pay a higher price, thus ensuring the quality of the product.

"I think that they are usually more expensive products because in the elaboration of a traditional food there are necessary some different raw materials". (grupofocal2)

"The price of traditional products varies if bought in fairs of these traditional products, in large surfaces or if we buy them directly from the producers". (grupofocal2)

"Are more expensive products and more out of your region" (grupofocal1)

8. A process of development (DO)

Consumers know the Denomination of Origin of a product, a certificate that relate with traditional food, linking it to a specific region that produces a traditional food, with unique products of the area.

"The products with this type of certificate are usually traditional products of origin of a certain place. They have a certificate in which people trust, and I think that most people know what these certificates mean." (grupofocal2)

Structure of concepts

Factors
1. Region 1.1 Region due to family aspects 1.2 Region due to cultural aspects
2. Flavor
3. Aspect
4 .Health
5. The epoch of the year
6. Naturalness
7. Quality-price
8. Process of development (OJ)

Table2

CONCLUSION

When we speak of tradition we are talking about the set of cultural patterns of one or several generations, inherited from the previous ones and, by the value given to them, sent to the following generations. Therefore, if we make reference to traditional foods, we refer to this food of frequent consumption or associated with specific celebrations, which are transmitted from one generation to another. Facts in a specific way in accordance with the gastronomic heritage, processed naturally, distinguished and known by its sensory properties and associated to a particular place, region or country.

All these aspects that define the traditional food are the factors that will determine the consumer to choose a traditional product or another.

The region, from which the food comes, is the most significant factor for consumers. A food made in a given region, with a defendant and a raw material only that is not available in any other place is the main factor for consumers to consume it before another product. This happens because, as similar as it may seem, if it is not in the region, it will not be equal. By this, there are certain certificates of quality and the well-known appellations of origin, to ensure that the product that you are consuming is a food made with raw materials and through a process of concrete preparing.

Another important determining factor when it comes to consuming traditional foods is the quality you are looking for the consumer in the product they are consuming. Despite the fact that its price may be higher than that of other foods, consumers prefer to ensure a higher quality.

In general, the price is recognized as an important factor that influences the choice of food in general (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Shobal, & Falk, 1996; Jomori, Proenca, and Calvo, 2008; Steptoe et al, 1995). Therefore also in traditional foods; you can consider the price as a barrier that prevents consumers from purchasing more local and traditional products.

The taste is an important determining factor in the consumption, and more when we talk about food for consumers. Traditional products are more tasty than the rest of food, and is therefore one important factor when choosing one food.

The concern that exists today with health, makes these products considered natural to be consumed with greater regularity. However, providing pleasure instead of nutrition and health

benefits ([Guerrero et al. , in press](#)). 'Natural', the term has been associated to other emotional terms such as traditional and homemade ([Bender, 1989](#)).

Another factor that determines the consumption of traditional food is the time of the year, celebrations, etc. , This is due to the fact that by culture and tradition, there are certain foods that we consume on specific dates, as can be Christmas, Easter, etc. Therefore, with the arrival of these dates, the consumption of these products suffers a great increase. It does not imply that during the rest of the year these foods are not offered or sold and that we cannot consume them. With the level of globalization that the world is currently achieving these foods can be consumed out of dates and concrete region.

Traditional foods are products which are in great demand by consumers today. In spite of their higher prices and availability in the market, its higher quality and naturalness, its process of development, its taste, its appearance, and of course, the region from which it comes, are factors that have a large influence on consumers. Therefore, and as I already knew, the traditional foods are closely related to the culture and the identity of the population where they are made, and have a strong symbolic value ([Guerrero et al. , 2009](#)).

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ANEXO 1

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WP2: Determinants that influence the choice of traditional food products

Key Parameters in the Consumer of Traditional Food Products

Methodology to organize Focus Groups in Portugal, Spain and Romania

Information to Participants

The Focus Group (FG) / Discussion Groups are an interviewing technique which normally meets six to twelve participants and a moderator at the scene of a structured discussion about a particular subject. Participants are carefully selected to ensure similar characteristics.

The questions are asked by the moderator and the objective is to collect the perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, idea, or packaging. Therefore, there are no right or wrong answers, it is important that each element expresses the opinion openly.

In the specific case of this study, the aim is to gather information about the perceptions and attitudes of consumers in the pick and consumption of traditional foods

Expected duration: 30-40 minutes

Number of participants: 4-8 people

Recording audio confidential

Definition of Traditional Food:

Traditional foods have been defined by European consumers as food products that are well-known, that one can eat often and that were eaten already by our grand-parents. A traditional food product is a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, transmitted from one generation to another, made in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, naturally processed, and distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country.

Questionary

1. When you hear the word traditional, which relates with it?
2. When you think of traditional foods, which are the ideas that come to your mind in first place? Which of these traditional foods usually consume?
3. What are the main reasons, the reasons that lead you to consume traditional foods instead of others? What distinguishes them from other foods? What features traditional foods are and which are important to you?
4. When do you consume these products? And why? (Inheritance, Family, Traditions, Celebrations, usually ...)
5. Where do you consume traditional foods? (Home, Dining, Events ...)
6. Where do you usually buy traditional products? (Large surfaces, Local Trade, Market)
7. Do you know traditional foods from different Regions? And do you pick foods according to this factor? (Certificates, DOP, DOC)
8. How do you evaluate relation quality-price of traditional foods?
9. Considers healthy traditional foods? More or less than others? These products are more natural?
10. Are traditional foods more flavors than other foods?

Characterization Sheet of Participants

Identification:

Nome _____ Data: ____ / ____ / ____

1. Please indicate your form of supply and how often you consume traditional foods?

1.1 Form of supply

Supermarkets	
Specific stores (gourmet, health food stores, ...)	
Convenience stores (gas stations, ...)	
Others:	

1.2 Consumption

Daily	
Almost every day	
3-4 times per week	
2 times per week	
1 time per week	
2-3 times per month	
One time per month	
7-11 times in the last year	
3-6 times in the last year	
1-2 times in the last year	

2. How old are the people in your household?
